

TOWARDS GLOBALIZATION: A CONSTRUCTIVE THEOLOGICAL PROPOSAL  
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The Church of the Nazarene<sup>1</sup> is a missionally-oriented Church. From the moment of its inception, this has been the case. This missional focus is inherent in the core doctrine of the CoTN: Holiness. We are not holy if we ourselves are not being renewed daily by the Spirit of God, according to the very mind of Christ Jesus the Son, in obedience to the Father. Likewise, we are not holy if we are not reaching out to others, sharing with them the peace, love, hope, and transformation made possible by the Gospel. In short, Nazarenes are a people characterized by the radical optimism of grace, who as a result, long for personal and communal transformation by proclaiming the possibility and reality of Holiness or Christian Perfection.

With this assumption, this paper intends to explore the precarious issue of the globalization of the Church from a theological perspective. This paper will not, therefore, address all the practical aspects and implications of the proposals made. Rather, my purpose is to explore the issue, theologically, and to make a suggestion or two about how we might move into the challenging and yet quite hopeful next phase of the CoTN, a future which we enter along with the broader Church catholic as a whole. Specifically, I will propose a significant change to the CoTN's Board of General Superintendents whereby the highest level of leadership in the CoTN might be truly global in makeup. This does not entail a critique of any particular General Superintendents, past or present, or of the board as a whole. Instead, my proposal recognizes that while some change best occurs from "the bottom," others simply will not happen unless careful, and intentional decisions are made from "the top." My hope is that these proposals will be received as in good faith with the theology of the CoTN as well as the basic organizational principle of our polity, namely, that the CoTN is a unified international fellowship of districts.

*Theology From a Different Perspective*

Freedom and liberation are central motifs for Christian theology. Our God is a God that sets us free from all sorts of bondage after all – bondage that we have created for ourselves. Liberation is a central theme in the Covenant, for the practice of jubilee, and for the *Euangelion* or Good News of God's Kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Unfortunately, though, theology has not always been liberating for all people. Such is the testimony of much of the theology that comes from "developing nations," as well as from those

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter CoTN.

who are and who have been underrepresented in Church history and governance, such as women and those who are anything but white.<sup>2</sup> Such theology, when done faithfully, seeks to read the words of Scripture through a different lens than it is often read – that of oppression, persecution, and poverty. Theology from such diverse perspectives can serve as a helpful corrective and even as an ideological critique to the inevitable hegemonic temptations of the “established” Church.

One particularly helpful contemporary example of just such a different perspective can be found in Ugandan Roman Catholic priest and theologian Emmanuel Katongole’s work on the Church in Rwanda. His book, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith After Genocide in Rwanda*, is a helpful resource for asking tough questions about the nature, witness, and future of the Church. Katongole asks how the genocide in Rwanda was possible, specifically in light of the overwhelmingly Christian status of Rwanda. The Christianization of the Rwandan people is the direct result of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century missionary endeavors. It was not just random people therefore that were hacking each other to bits with machetes and other crude instruments in the Rwandan genocide – it was Christians that were brutally murdering each other. Katongole suggests that the story that held Rwandans captive was less a story of God’s redemptive and reconciling love as revealed in Christ, and more that of Western colonialism. Much of this was unintentional, according to Katongole, but it was nonetheless true. “Many of the White [Catholic] Fathers were sincere missionaries. But they were caught up in a history they did not understand. Well-educated and pious church members, they became tools of a colonial project to ‘civilize’ and use African people.”<sup>3</sup> For Katongole, the story of Rwanda serves as a mirror to the realities of the Global Church – both its failures and its successes.

It would seem that even the most well-intentioned international missionary work has the potential for disastrous results if it is not focused on fostering indigenous leadership. Such a focus has always been present, in principle at least, in the missionary endeavors of the CoTN.

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<sup>2</sup> Such theology is often called “Liberation Theology.” This is both helpful and unhelpful, for surely all Christian theology, if it addresses humanity’s relationship to God, is, by necessity, “Liberation Theology.” At its best, Liberation Theology offers a helpful corrective, or supplement to dominant voices within the Church. At its worst, Liberation Theology circumvents the Gospel away from God’s Kingdom, and towards particular political regimes, revolutions, and philosophies. I believe it is helpful and necessary to seek the former, while striving to avoid the latter.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Katongole, *Mirror to the Church: Resurrecting Faith after Genocide in Rwanda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 63.

For example, in 1914 the General Missionary Board Secretary H.F. Reynolds wrote to “Drs. Bresee and Walker,” that the GMB believes that, “The mission church should be encouraged to assume as much of the support of the local work as is possible and be led to reach a place where it may become self-supporting and self-governing . . . .”<sup>4</sup> Almost 100 years later, the question is, have we truly embraced this emphasis on indigeneity? Katongole would affirm this missionary impulse that seeks to share the Gospel, empower local people, and then finally to encourage them to lead their own churches and administrative bodies within a truly global partnership. We are not seeking, after all, to spread the free market, democracy, or our empires, but rather we are engaged, “in mission to establish friendships that lead to the formation of a new people.”<sup>5</sup> The name for this new people is the Church, the diverse body of Christ in the world, which is the foretaste of the Kingdom of God.

Liberation Theology has taught us that colonialization often takes the form of religion, Christianity in particular, and that such colonizing principles are sinful. Missionary work does not equal colonization, but it can. Our duty is to ensure that missions is about the creation of a new people, and not the spreading out of a particular empire. I would argue that the missionary based internationalization process that the CoTN has undergone over much of its first century is natural and healthy for the spread of the Gospel. It is time, however, to fully embrace our original drive towards indigenous leadership, by implementing structural changes in our polity. Such changes must begin at the top, and work downward in order to fully affirm and embrace our global community. Those in power, after all, must divest themselves of power and share it with others, if they are to truly have power themselves.<sup>6</sup> This is surely in keeping with the cruciform pattern of ministry present in Jesus’s own ministry. Church leadership, then, especially white North Americans like myself, must invite those from the “International Community” into positions of power, thereby limiting our own power, in relationship to the increase of power for

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<sup>4</sup> Jon Johnson, Chairperson, “Resource Information From ANSR (Association of Nazarene Sociologists of Religion) Prepared Especially for the Internationalization Commission,” 1987. This is a common focus in the reports of the Commission on the Internationalization of the Church

<sup>5</sup> Katongole, 156.

<sup>6</sup> Here I fully embrace Michel Foucault’s understanding of power, which is, essentially, a strategy utilized amongst a network of relationships, rather than an object to be picked up and wielded against others. True power, for Foucault, is predicated upon truly free relationships where power dynamics are agreed upon by all. Anything less than this is authoritarianism.

those who currently are not able to hold power. The result, I would argue, is a truly global communion of districts sharing power with one another in a radically egalitarian manner. If we fail to make such changes, I believe that we run the risk of quite literally sinning against our sisters and brothers in the various parts of the world that formerly were classified as “foreign mission fields.”

*Current Nazarene International Polity*

As has already been demonstrated, internationalization or globalization is not a new phenomenon for the CoTN. In fact, it might be argued that only the Roman Catholic Church has been more effective than the CoTN in terms of globalization. Currently there are more Nazarenes outside the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, than within these countries. Moreover, the growth rate of the CoTN in these “other” world areas is monumental compared to the flat or even decreasing membership of the CoTN in the USA, Canada, and the UK. Despite such obvious trends towards globalization, members of the upper levels of denominational hierarchy remain almost exclusively from the United States, and are, in most cases men.<sup>7</sup> This is a real problem that must be promptly addressed with all seriousness and intentionality. The various Commissions on the Internationalization of the Church have sought to aid the general Church in doing just this.

All of the reports of the CIC have, to a lesser or greater extent, affirmed the need for the commission, and specifically for the need for the CoTN to pursue globalization. Generally, they hold to three assumptions, as they seek to aid in the process of globalization.

1. It is the desire of the CoTN to be a “global church.”
2. There is a strong commitment to maintaining a set of “nonnegotiable core values” of the denomination.
3. The concept of “nonsymmetrical structure” for the global church is considered the most workable approach.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> With the exception of current GS Eugenio Duarte, from Cape Verde, and female former GS Nina Gunter (2005-2009), every General Superintendent in the history of the CoTN has been a North American Male. One possibly exception, Samuel Young (1948-1972), was originally from Glasgow, Scotland, but his family immigrated to the US at age 15. The CoTN has yet to have a Canadian GS. Of additional interest is the fact that of the 81 USA/Canada districts, only 1 of the current District Superintendents is female. There are currently four non-white DS’s, all of whom serve Native or Latin American Districts.

<sup>8</sup> “Report of the Commission on the International Church to the Twenty-Fourth General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene,” June 22-27, 1997 (San Antonio, TX USA), 101-2. “Non-Symmetrical” refers to the 1993 report of the same Commission. “In order to deal with an

Many of them call for mandatory quotas for balancing the makeup of future boards and commissions between members from USA/Canada and those from other parts of the world.<sup>9</sup> Some make proposals for structural changes such as a proposal for regional assemblies (1985) and the appointment of Regional Directors. In short, these boards do the necessary work of changing the nomenclature and understanding of what it means to be Nazarene. For example, the 1997 report affirmed that “church membership” meant worldwide membership, and therefore that all Nazarene are equal members.<sup>10</sup> None of these reports may have been as important as the 1993 report’s affirmation of a “borderless world” or “global village.” This report affirms the historic goal of indigenous leadership and, in affirmation of the same commission’s report from 1985, states, “We interpret this to mean that all sectors of the church have equal access to leadership and resources of the church.”<sup>11</sup> This report goes on to positively cite the 1989 report of the same commission in saying,

We endorse the affirmation of the 1989 Internationalization Commission in “that we continue to be a denomination with a representative democracy at every level of church organization.” However, we recognize that in a day of increased democratization, people

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international church in a real world, we believe it is necessary to disavow structures and conclusions that are built and based on a perception of the world as symmetrical. The world is not a symmetrical cone—but a kaleidoscope of colors, cultures, geography, languages, history. All lead to a need for sensitive and unique approaches, methods, and strategies that can be blended and molded within context . . . The report is built on the premise that structures, procedures, and responses must be molded to fit these unique differences. The time has passed when a superstructure can be created that meets every need or responds to every circumstance in an equal manner.” “Report of the Commission on the International Church to the Twenty-Third General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene,” July 25-30, 1993 (Indianapolis, IN USA), 214.

<sup>9</sup> The importance of this point cannot be overstated. With each GA, and thus with each report of the CIC, there has been an increasing move towards globalization and the seeking after of a truly “global perspective” through striving for diversity on both boards and denominational leadership. In this way, this paper is merely calling for the next and logical progression of this process, by calling for the same commitments to be applied to the board of General Superintendents as well. The 1997 decision to designate the USA/Canada as a mission field is worth noting here, as well, as this decision reflects an attempt to think of the CoTN as a global church, rather than a US church with branches on foreign soil.

<sup>10</sup> 1997 CIC Report, 211.

<sup>11</sup> 1993 CIC Report, 215.

want more than “representative” democracy. *They crave for “participatory” democracy; they want direct personal, hands-on involvement.*<sup>12</sup>

It is at this point that we must pause and affirm the work of the 1993 board. We must also, though, ask when such participatory democracy will actually be embraced and put into practice in the CoTN? It is hard to affirm that all Nazarenes truly have equal access to leadership, and that we have a participatory democracy, given the gross disparity in the ratio between numbers of non-North American Nazarene members and non-North American General Superintendents. This disparity must end. To repeat a point I have already made, such a disparity is a natural outcome of a missionary-based Church. Such a disparity is acceptable - but only for so long. The time has come to embrace the reality of being a truly global church - a reality that already exists - by doing everything in our power to put a stop to the disparate ratio between non-North American members and leaders in the CoTN.

This is surely neither the first time such a proposal has been made, nor is it the most thorough proposal. I have not had the benefit of being a part of the CIC, sitting in on the discussions, and brainstorming about the practicalities involved in addressing this problem. There are those who have come to similar conclusions, though, who have had such experiences. In 1985, German national and then Regional Director for Africa Rev. Dr. R. F. Zanner, submitted a very helpful and challenging report to the ICC about many of these same issues. In that report he asks one very fundamental question, “Are we going to be an international church or will we remain an American church with branches based on foreign soil?”<sup>13</sup> Zanner’s report is honest, real, and clearly reveals the loyal opposition of a man who has seen the CoTN from the “international” perspective. Without question, this document was likely wrongly interpreted as

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 218. Emphasis mine.

<sup>13</sup> R.F. Zanner, “The International Church at Cross Roads (A Critical But Constructive Paper on the Internationalization Dilemma), submitted to the Internationalization Commission of the Church of the Nazarene, August 5, 1985 (Florida USA), 2-3. Note that the language clearly implies Zanner’s opinion that the CoTN (at least at that time) was not a truly international church, but rather an American church with branches in foreign soil. The use of “American” versus “foreign” is clearly intentional, as well, as opposed to a global view of the world implied by internationalization. My impression is that Zanner believed that the move towards being a truly international church was the best possible choice moving forward if the CoTN desired to be faithful both to the Gospel and its own history. Such a move, therefore, was the logical progression of a missionary-based church that truly desired to train, equip, and empower indigenous leadership.

“dangerous” and possibly even “subversive.” Almost twenty years later, though, his description of the CoTN still rings fairly true and his question linger. We must continue to ask Zanner’s question if we are to be faithful to both the Gospel and to our Nazarene roots.

### *The Gospel*

The *Euangelion* or good news of God’s Kingdom that Jesus proclaimed is not simply a thing that we wait for. In fact, according to Jesus the Kingdom has begun, and yet it longs for fulfillment. Recall Jesus’s first recorded public “sermon,” where he declares the fulfillment of the prophetic words of the prophet Isaiah.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Luke 4: 18-21 NRSV

This was not a minority report or an isolated message. The immanent and yet anticipatory nature of the Kingdom of God was the substance of Jesus’s teachings. Likewise, because of the in-breaking Kingdom, achieved by the obedient, reconciliatory work of Son, poured out into all by the Spirit, Jesus taught his followers that they were to live lives of holiness – before God and others. The proclamation that holiness is not simply an impossible striving, but rather something actually attainable by the grace of the Holy Spirit, as taught by John Wesley, is at the very heart of what it means to be Nazarene. We do not have the “benefit,” therefore, of passively sitting around waiting for the Eschaton when God will right all things. Instead, the belief that the divine work of making all things new has already begun, and can be experienced in this life, is foundational for both our faith and our polity. The Gospel, universal in scope as it is, then, must be evident and operative not just in our local churches, but in our denominational hierarchy as well. I am convinced that if we embrace the global nature of the Gospel, the Church will grow. Many systems and structures will survive, while others will surely pass away. This process will simply birth new centers of global denominational support and governance. “The Church is the Lord’s,” as Ron Benefiel has reminded us.<sup>14</sup> May we strive to ensure that our polity and governing structures and offices reflect this radical optimism of the grace of God at work in the global church.

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<sup>14</sup> Ron Benefiel, “Internationalization: Perspectives Form a Local Church. Whose Church is This Anyway?” 1987, Submitted to the ANSR.

### *Proposals*

To truly embrace the realities of being a global church, significant changes must occur at the highest levels of the CoTN. Such changes reflect grass roots change that has swept through the CoTN for the last several decades, as seen in the number of Nazarene members outside of USA/Canada and the UK compared to members inside these same areas. Building upon the commendable work of so many who have gone before in the CIC and in other areas of the CoTN I would propose two possible ways forward then, specifically for the highest level of governance in the CoTN: the board of General Superintendents.

#### *Proposal 1<sup>15</sup>*

*Expand the number of General Superintendents from six to twelve, two for each region. GS's for each region must be natives of the same region, or else must have lived there for a suitable number of consecutive years (10-12+ for example . . .) in order to be able to truly represent the interests and needs of that region. Additionally, require that at least one of the GS's for each region be a female. GS's would reside on their home regions while in office.*

#### *Proposal 2<sup>16</sup>*

*Decrease the number of General Superintendents from six to three, with no more than one GS allowed from each region. Thus while not every region would always be directly represented, no region would have more representation than any other. These three GS's would live and work close to one another, and would serve as the final word in matters of theology, polity, and issues of practical ecclesial administration. With the decrease in GS's, each region would have 2-3 Regional Coordinators, derived from said region, with at least one female serving as RC for each region. These RC's would have more authority and*

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<sup>15</sup> Admittedly, the structure of proposal 1 runs the risk of creating an alliance of regional churches, shifting the focus away from local churches and therefore districts, onto that of the region. In this way, this might be called federalization. Likewise, critics might suggest that this proposal assumes a symmetrical approach to the global church – something that has been routinely decried by the CIC, et al. While this is an important critique, it begs the question, though, of whether or not our nonsymmetrical approach to the global church has become, in fact, a way of giving precedent to the North American church.

<sup>16</sup> As with proposal 1, proposal 2 is not perfect. It avoids the regionalization critique of proposal 1, but it creates the conundrum of who will ordain new pastors, and where and when will these ordination services be held. Surely three GS's cannot cover annual Ordination Services across the entire globe. Option 2 would require, therefore, fewer Ordination Services (every other year, regional services, or even holding ordinations until General Assemblies, for example) or the allowance for RC's and/or DS's to preside over the ordination of new Elders and Deacons. I believe this option preserves unified central authority, and yet also heightens regional, and therefore, district autonomy.

responsibility than RC's currently do, but would not be on the level of the GS. RC's, in effect, would serve as Superintendents to the many District Superintendents on their region.

Both proposals presuppose several things. First, they assume the heightened use of Internet based communication technologies such as Skype, GoogleTalk, Adobe Connect, and Apple's FaceTime, et al. Such methods of communication easily allow for seamless communication despite great distances. Such methods of communication can serve as the basis for significant financial savings for the global church as well. Additionally, for meetings of regional and international leaders, a rotation of international meetings spaces can be utilized, rather than officials always flying in and out of Kansas City, MO USA. These measures would result in significant financial savings for the global church, especially in regard to travel expenses. These savings would, hopefully, cover the additional costs of more GS's and/or more RC's.

### *Conclusion*

That one of these two proposals is the correct way forward is not clear. These are simply two limited proposals from a young theologian and pastor who is loyal and faithful to the CoTN and yet who is hopeful that change will occur soon. What is clear, though, is that we must quickly choose a way forward, collectively, as a global church. Obedience to the Gospel and fidelity to our Nazarene heritage require that we finally enact the steps necessary to truly embrace being a global church, rather than an American Church with branches on foreign soil. Doing so will require significant change, including intentional divestment of power by those at the highest levels of church governance. We must trust in the Holy Spirit, God's active presence in the Church, as we seek a truly global polity, where all people have equal access to leadership.

The mirror is held up. The world and future generations are looking. How will we respond? My hunch, is that an intentional movement towards such a truly global church will usher in an unprecedented time of growth and faithfulness for the CoTN. Nazarenes are a holiness people; we are a resurrection people; we are a pentecostal people. As such, we must trust in the radical optimism of grace, and welcome people from all over the world not just into membership, or even as clergy, but we must give them equal access to the highest forms of leadership by placing self-imposed limits on our own access to leadership. May God help us, a vagabond people on the journey of discipleship, as we walk this global path together. Amen.